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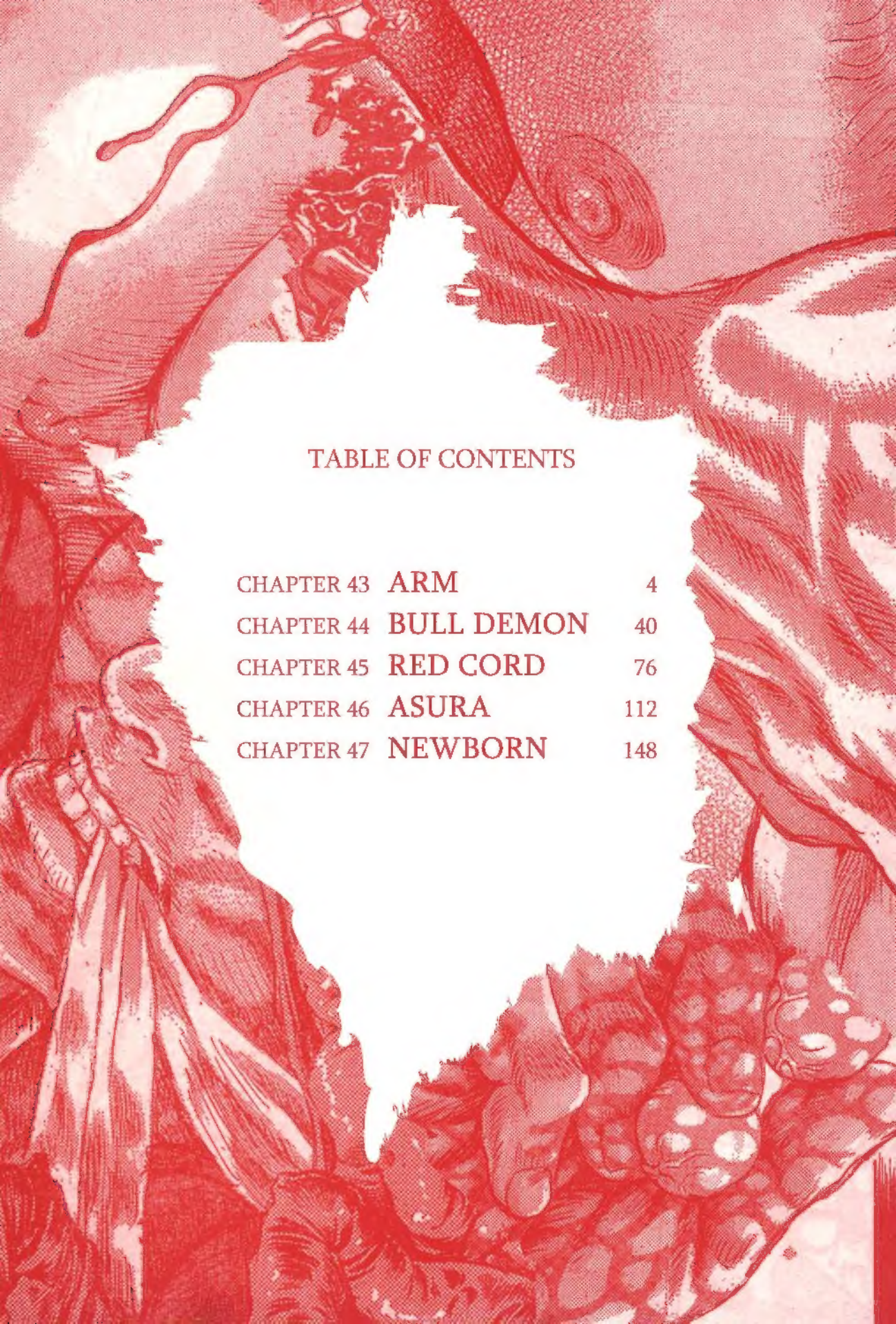

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CHAPTER 43
ARM

十
人

AAAGH!

OOOH!

AAH...

KIE-GAAA!

BUT...

AT THAT TIME,

EVERY SINGLE CELL IN IRAKO SEIGEN'S BODY WAS SCREAMING IN AGONY.

NOT ONCE, BUT TWICE HAD HE USED HIS MOST DESPERATE TECHNIQUE, POURING EVERY OUNCE OF STRENGTH HE HAD INTO THE STRIKE

HIS LEFT ARM, HAVING BLOCKED THE TERRIFYING FORCE OF MUMYOU SAKANABARE

GENNOSUKE, TOO, WAS TAXED TO HIS VERY LIMITS

HAD GONE COMPLETELY NUMB.

HE HAD NOT EVEN THE STRENGTH TO KEEP HOLD OF HIS SHOUTOU!

THE MOMENT HE PUT HIS LEFT HAND ON HIS LARGER SWORD,

TO KEEP SEIGEN FROM NOTICING HIS WEAKNESS...

Spell of the Sea

NOW...

HOW CAN THIS BE

THE ARM THAT HAD BLOCKED MUMYOU SAKANABARE WAS SEVERED

SEIGEN'S NOSTRILS FLARED,

TAKING IN THE SCENT OF HIS RIVAL'S FRESH BLOOD.

FUJIKI

...

IRAKOOO!

THE GREAT BLADE OF KOGAN-RYUU, REKNOWNED FOR ITS SUPERNATURAL ACCURACY.

MISSED IRAKO'S HEAD, PASSING CLEAR ABOVE ITS INTENDED TARGET.

AS A BEHEADED CHICKEN FRANTICALLY BEATING ITS WINGS.

FROM THE [illegible]

HIS CENTER OF BALANCE HAD BEEN GREATLY SKEWED DUE TO THE LOSS OF HIS LEFT ARM

THROWING OFF EVERY MOVEMENT OF HIS BODY

GET UP.

GET TO YOUR FEET, GENNOSUKE!

LET GO...

LET...

LET GO...

THE ONLY
ROAD FOR
A MAN BORN
TO THE
HOUSE OF
SAMURAI,

A SAMURAI
IS LIKE A
SEA SHELL.

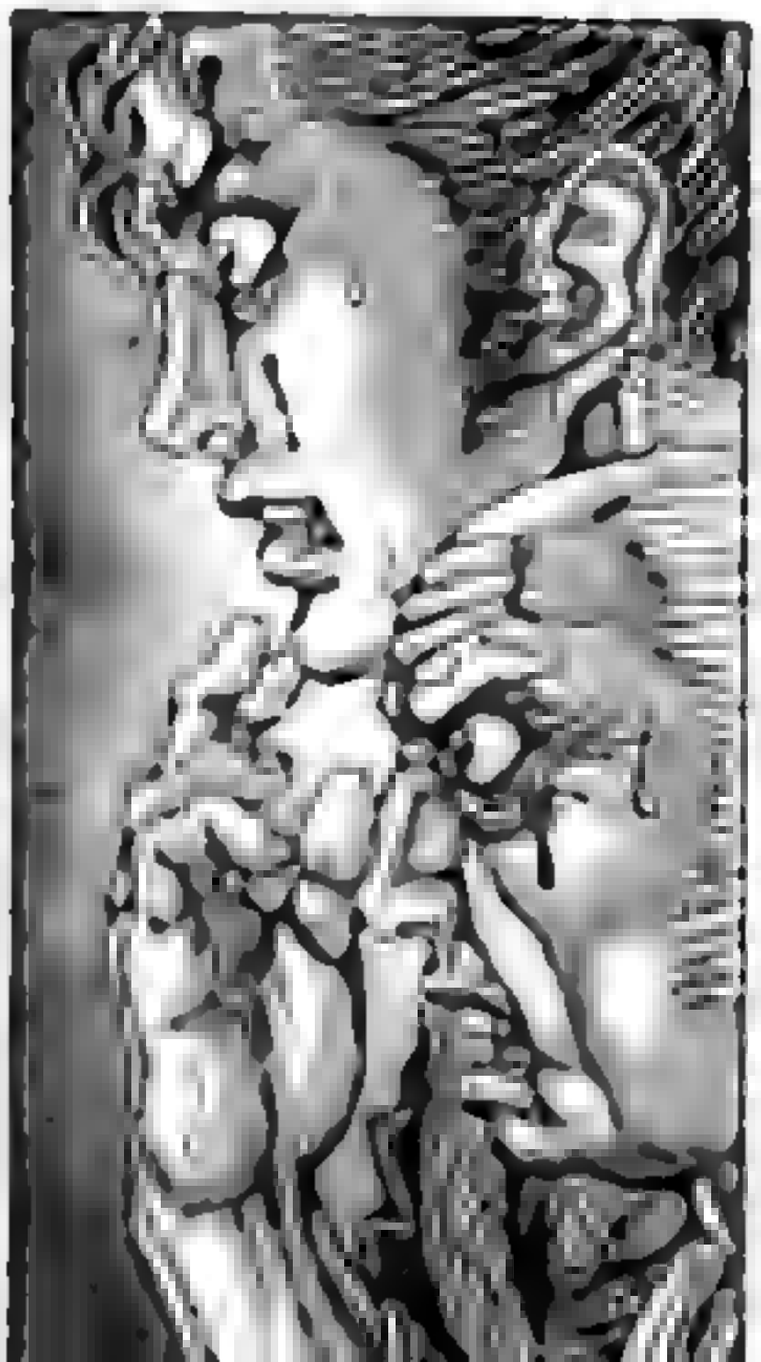
IS TO GIVE THIS VERY LIFE, IF NEED BE,

IN SERVICE OF THAT HOUSE.

Chapter 31

Bull Demon

THE
THE MASTER
LOST
THE



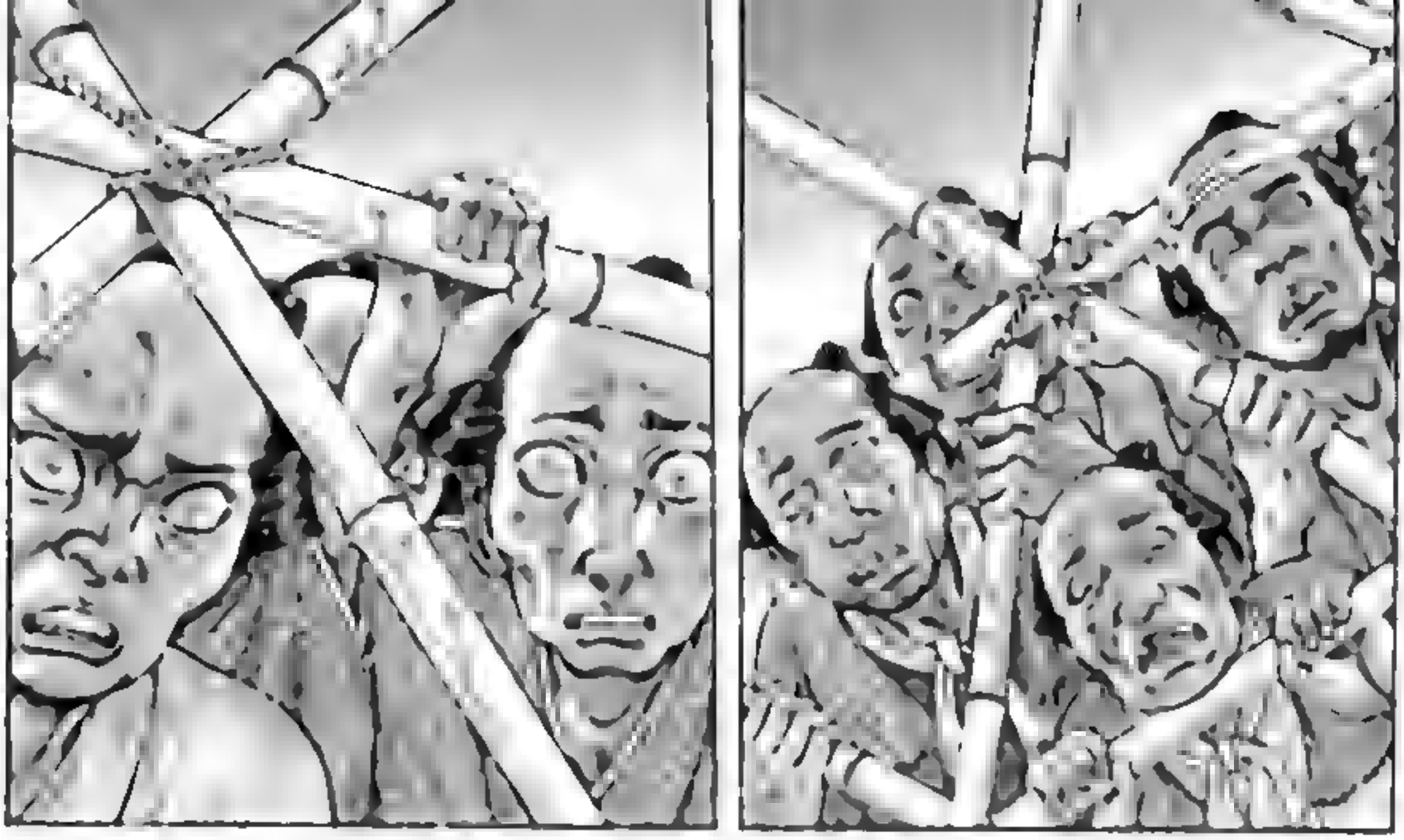
FLOWING,

AH, IT IS SUCH A SHAME.

MY SWORD IS SURELY CURSED

EVEN THOUGH IT WAS SANCTIONED BY LAW
TO THINK THAT I WOULD END UP STRIKING DOWN NOT ONLY THE UNRIVALED MAESTRO KOGAN-SAMA
BUT ALSO THE YOUNG TIGER PUTTING GENOSAKE-DONO

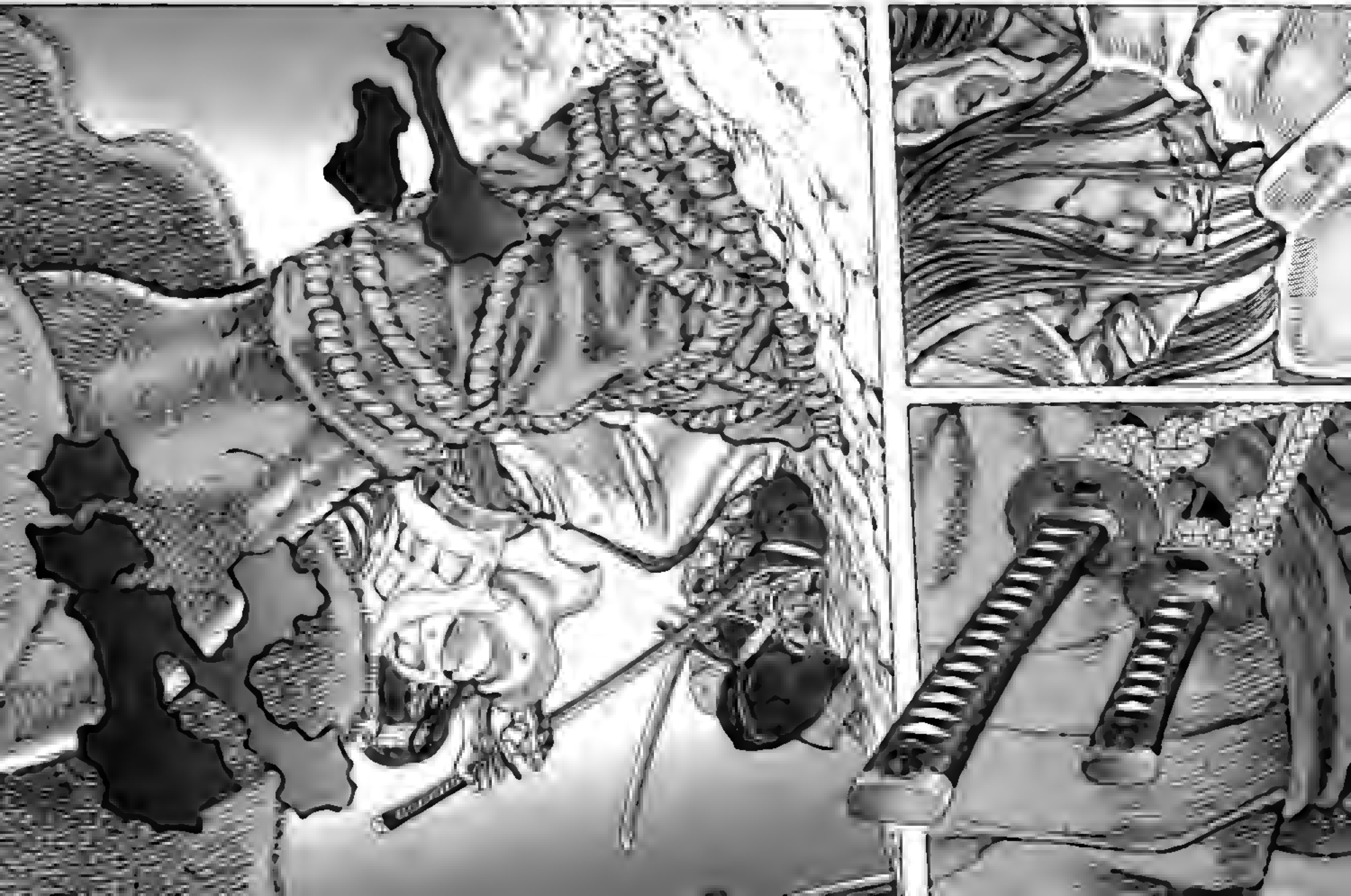
VERILY. IT IS SUCH A SHAME



OUR SOULS QUIETLY AND WORDLESSLY COMMUNICATING...

I HAD WISHED ONLY TO TRAIN IN THE WAYS OF THE SWORD TOGETHER WITH YOU

"IT'S QUITE AS A SURVIVOR SAID.



LIGHT

IN A BLOOD FEUD, IT IS FORBIDDEN TO INTERVENE WITHOUT PERMISSION.

A, AN ASSIS-TANT?!

MMM! GONZA!

FURTHERMORE, IF THE DUELIST CANNOT CONTINUE FIGHTING DUE TO WOUNDS, A PERSON WITH CLOSE TIES IS PERMITTED TO TAKE UP HIS PLACE.

HOWEVER, FIGHTING IN ONE'S STEAD IS ALLOWED IF THE DUELIST-TO-BE IS A CHILD OR WOMAN.

GONZA WAS LIKE A SON TO KOGAN

LOOK AT THAT MAN

AS LONG AS HE STILL HOLDS THAT SWORD HIGH,

GENNOSUKE LIVES!

SHIZUHATA KENGYOU SLOWLY ROSE FROM HIS SEAT,

AND RAISED HIS RIGHT HAND TO THE HEAVENS

AND LO

IF AN ASSISTANT COMES FORWARD, IT IS ALLOWED FOR THE OTHER SIDE TO EMPLOY ASSISTANTS AS WELL.

THERE IS NO LIMIT TO THE NUMBER OF ASSISTANTS EITHER SIDE CAN CALL UPON!

IT WAS THEREFORE COMMON TO SEE BLOOD FEUDS END IN HEATED BRAWLS OF DOZENS AGAINST DOZENS OF MEN,

AND AT TIMES,

ONE SINGLE BATTLE COULD RESULT IN THE ANNIHILATION OF AN ENTIRE CLAN.

THOUGH THE ASSISTANTS ON SEIGEN'S SIDE,

NUMBERED NO LESS THAN ELEVEN MEN,

THEY WERE WARRIORS THAT THE KENGYOU HAD HIRED WITH MONEY.

THESE MEN IN THE PAST.

HAD BEEN THE HONOR GUARD OF A DAIMYOU THAT THE SHOGUNATE HAD DE-STROYED,

ON THE OTHER HAND STANDING FOR THE CLAN A DIAMOND

IT WENT WITHOUT SAYING THAT THEIR SKILLS WERE MOST IMPRESSIVE

AND AS THEIR MISSION WAS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE,

THE OLD SERVANT MOSUKE

BONZAEMON WOULD SOON BE IMPALED BY ELEVEN SPEARS,

WHO AMONG THEM WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT FUJIKI GENNOSUKE COULD LOSE?

AND THEN HIS MASTER ALSO DIE

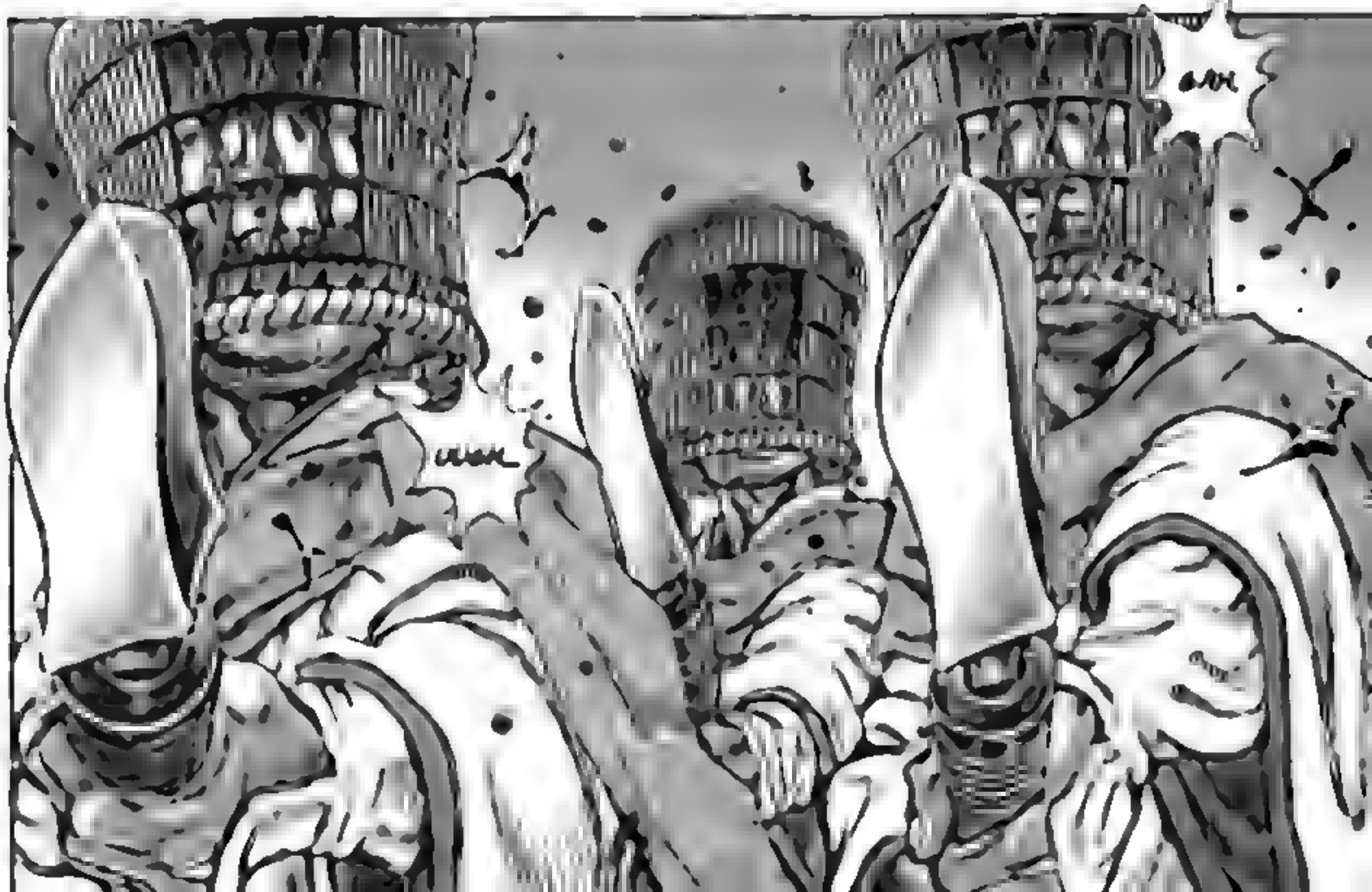
DRAW YOUR SWORD.

WILL YOU NOT DRAW?

IN THE MAN'S HANDS.

WERE INCREDIBLY HEAVY WOODEN SWORDS, USELESS AS ACTUAL WEAPONS.

HIS EYES WERE WITHOUT FOCUS


AHH

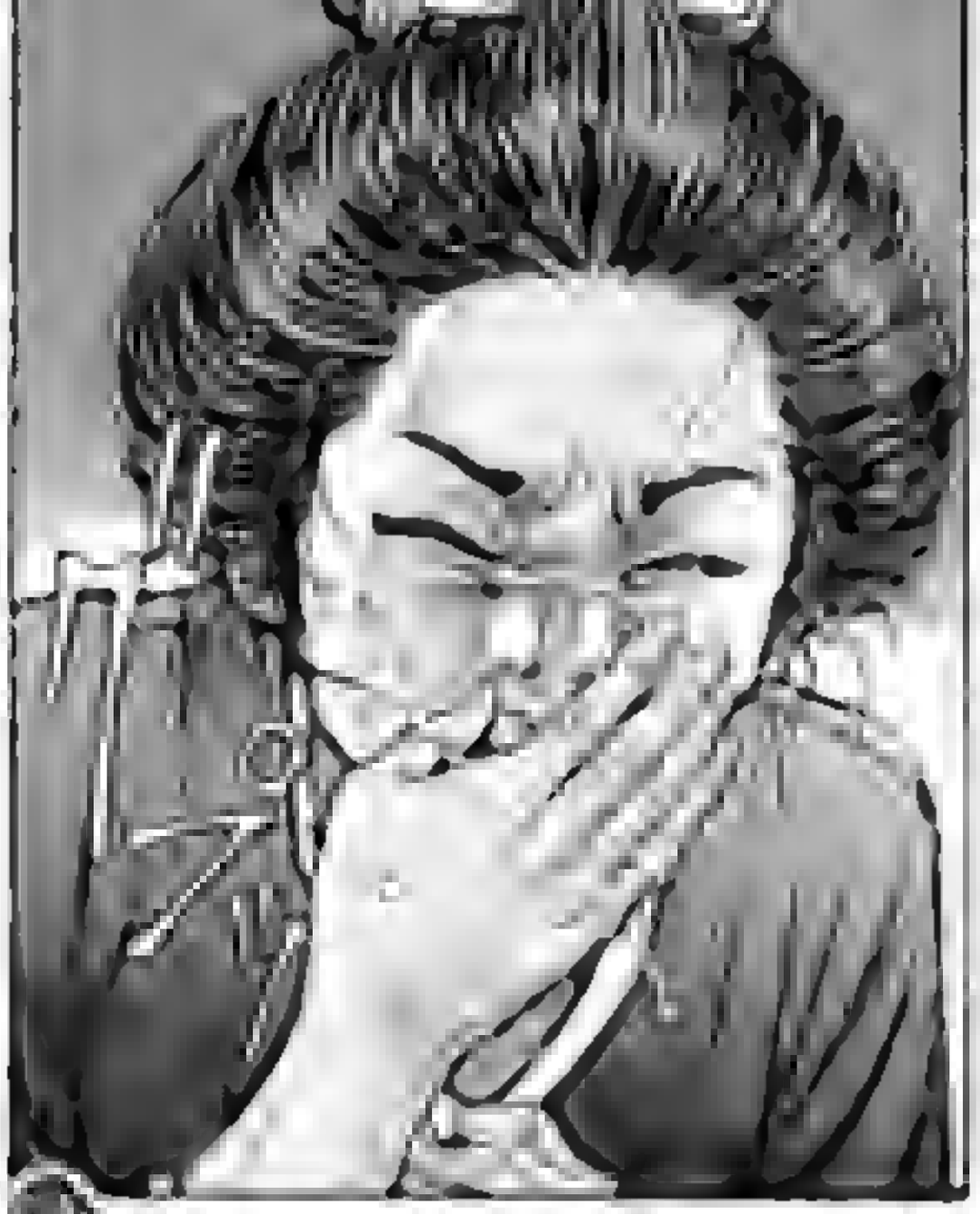
ARRGH
VIETNAM.
POSSESSED
OF IRON
STRENGTH
AND STEELY
WILL.
CASUALTY.
FLUNG ALL
THOSE WHO
OPPOSED HIM
BODILY
THROUGH
THE AIR.
AYE.

TEARING APART AND DEVOURING ANY WHO STOOD IN HIS WAY.

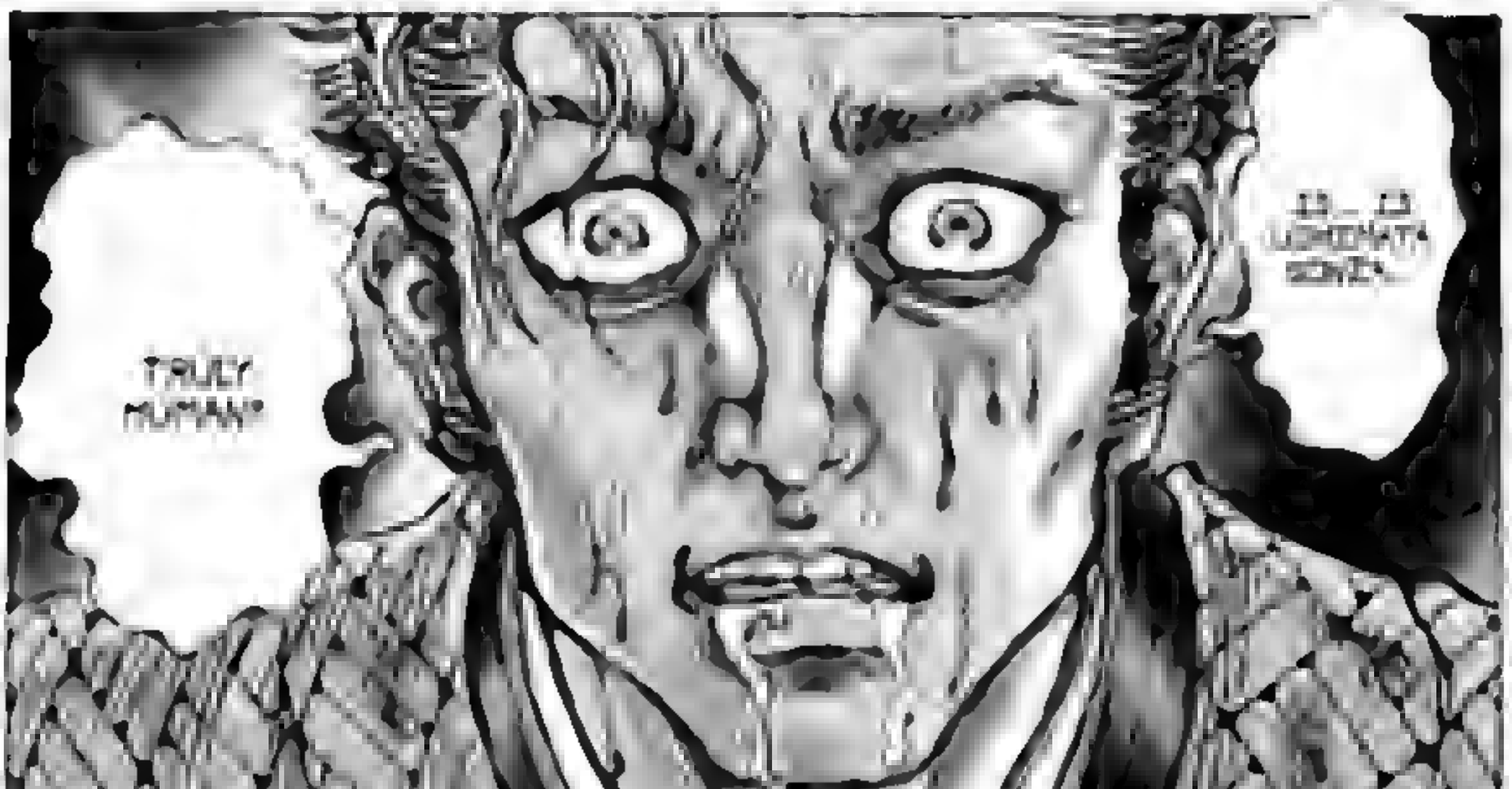
LIKE A BULL DEMON

AN UNBELIEVABLY TERRIBLE SIGHT

CHAPTER 45
RED CORD



PATRICK


TRULY HUMAN?
LOBOTOMY SCARS

KEICHOU ERA.

SANSHIU,
KOROMO.

FUKU.

I WILL RETURN IN THREE YEARS,

AS A FINE SWORDSMAN.

USHIMATA GONZABURO
(GONZAEMON'S NAME AS A CHILD.)

FUKU

THE WARRIOR'S
REPEATED SILENTLY IN HIS HEART

AND STEADILY MET HIS GAZE

ONE DAY,

ASSISTANT MASTER AT HIS DOUJOU FOR LIFE,

OF REASON THAT FORMIDABLE SORCERER LOW RANKED SAMURAI WAS TO LEAVE HIS PLACE

WROTE A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION FOR HIM AND SENT HIM TO A CERTAIN DOJOU

LAUDED AS UNRIVALED IN ALL OF JAPAN

HIS MASTER WHO DO NOT WISH TO SEE HIS SKILLS GO TO WASTE

KOGAN-RYUU.

BISHU
KAGANO.

GONZABURO SMILED, REVEALING HIS WHITE TEETH.

LET'S HAVE A LITTLE MATCH, SHALL WE?

INTERESTING!

IBUKI HANSHINKEN

WELL. HOW IS HE. HANSHINKEN?

THIS IS NO BOAR

THIS THIS IS A BULL

THE POUNDING OF HIS HEART NEVER CEASED.

GONZABURO STARED AT THAT BEAN UNTIL THE SUN ROSE INTO THE HEAVENS.

THE FIRST TRAINING DISCIPLINE GIVEN TO [illegible] GONZABURO WAS [illegible]"KIRIKAESHI."

WHILE
AND

THE FAITHFUL DESCIPLE HAD

WHILE HIS MASTER WAS GON-

AND HE BECAME ABLE TO SLICE THROUGH A ROLLED UP MAT WITH A WOODEN SWORD.

ONCE THIS TRAINING WAS OVER,

CALLUSES ON GONZABURO'S PALMS BECAME THICKER THAN THE ONES ON HIS FEET.

AND THOUGH HE TOOK HIS STUDENTS OUT INTO THE MOUNTAINS AT NIGHT TO TRAIN,

HE DID NOT ALLOW GONZABURO TO FOLLOW

SENSEI.

I BEG OF YOU, IMPART YOUR KNOWLEDGE UPON THIS LOWLY GONZABURO AS WELL...

AND IF YOU DO NOT SEE WITHIN ME THE POTENTIAL, PLEASE STRIKE ME DOWN NOW.

I CANNOT TAKE ALONG A BULL,

THAT HAS NOT LET GO OF ITS TETHER.

CONSEQUENTLY IT IS ALSO THOUGHT THAT HE HAS BEEN ATTACKED.

FROM TIME TO TIME,
A SCARLET CORD
HAD RISEN UP IN
GONZABURO'S MIND.

SENSEI HAS SENSED THE CORD,

THAT I NEVER ONCE SPOKE OF IN MY LIFE!

AND WHEN HE FELT HIS WAY ALONG IT,

TO THE SOMEONE ON THE OTHER END,

FOR THE FIRST TIME GONZABURO LOOKED INTO HIS MASTER'S EYES

HE WAS ENVELOPED IN A SENSE OF HAPPINESS THAT COULD NOT BE DESCRIBED IN WORDS

AND ANOTHER
YEAR PASSED.

AND CHANGED HIS NAME TO GONZAEMON.

GONZABURO BECAME AN ADULT.

WAS NOTHING SHORT OF A MIRACLE.

—THAT THESE TWO PEOPLE CAME TO THAT PLACE, AT THAT TIME, ON THAT DAY,

FUKU.

"FROM THE MOMENT OF BIRTH, THE LEGS OF A COUPLE DESTINED TO BECOME MAN AND WIFE ARE CONNECTED WITH A RED CORD."

—*TAIHEI KYOUKI

*JAPANESE NAME FOR THE TAOIST CLASSIC ANTERTSU VERSION OF CHINESE STORIES

CASTRATED HIMSELF WITH HIS BARE HANDS

USHIMATA GONZAEMON, WAS HE HUMAN, OR DEMON?

A WILD BEAST, OR SOMETHING WORSE?

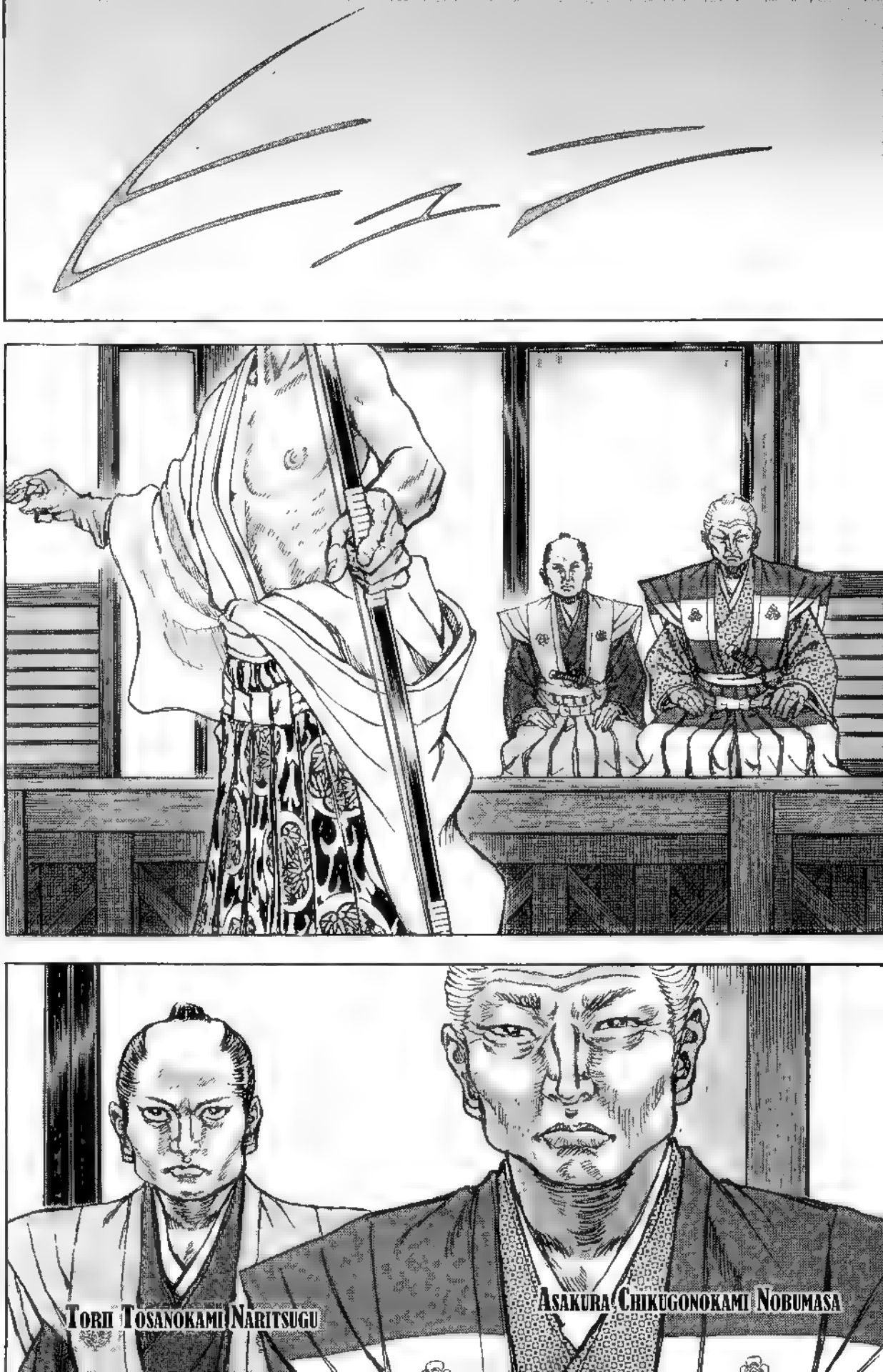
A WRAITH?

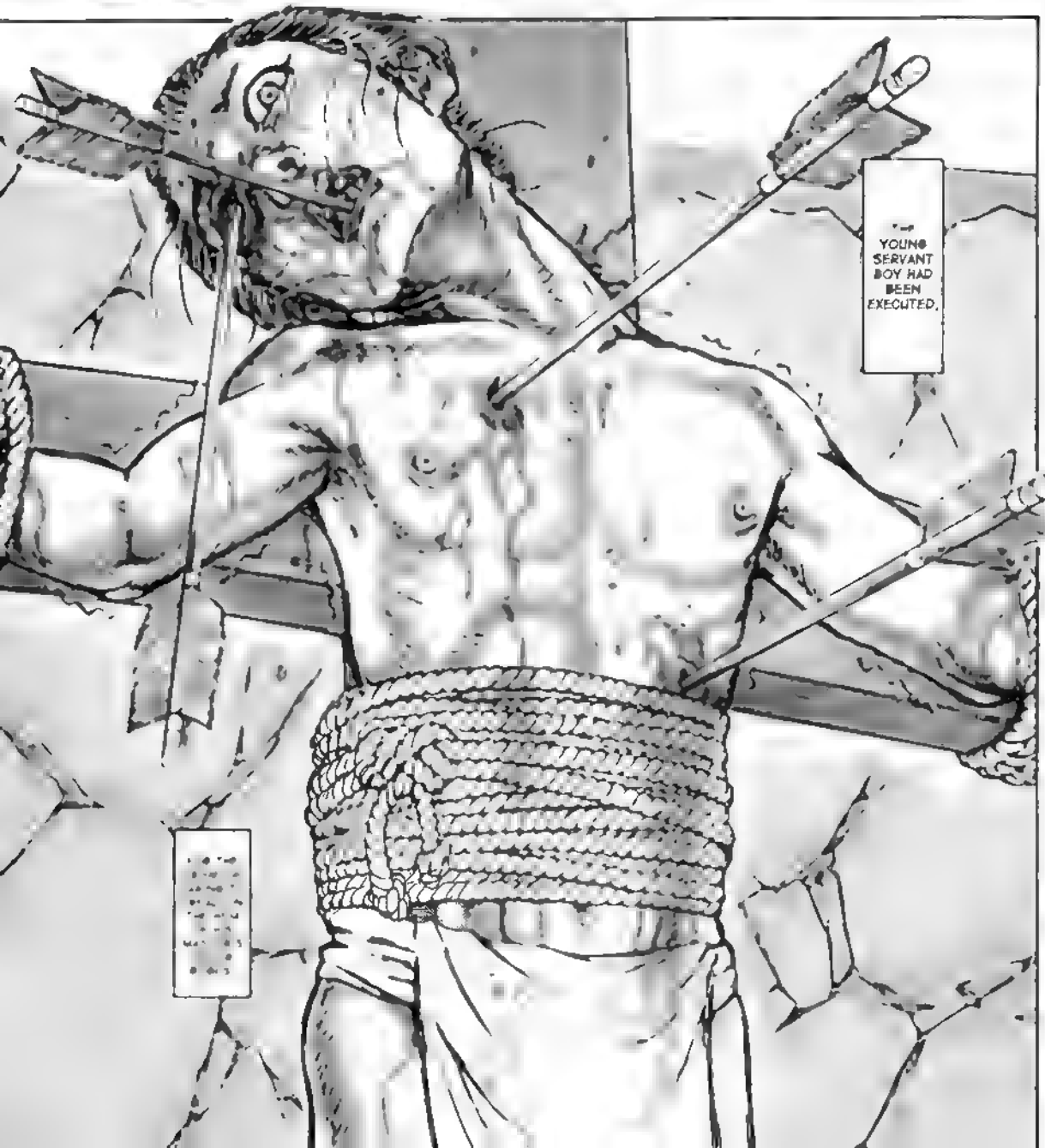
OR SOMETHING WORSE?

CHAPTER 36
ASURA

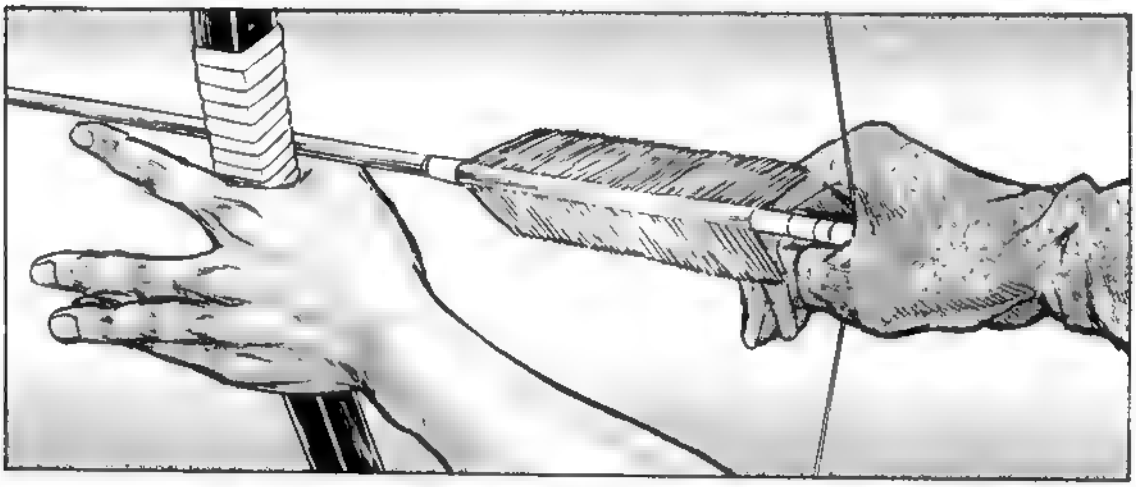
SUNPU CASTLE

LORD OF SURUGA
TOKUGAWA TADANAGA


Torii Tosanokami Naritsugu
Asakura Chikugonokami Nobumasa

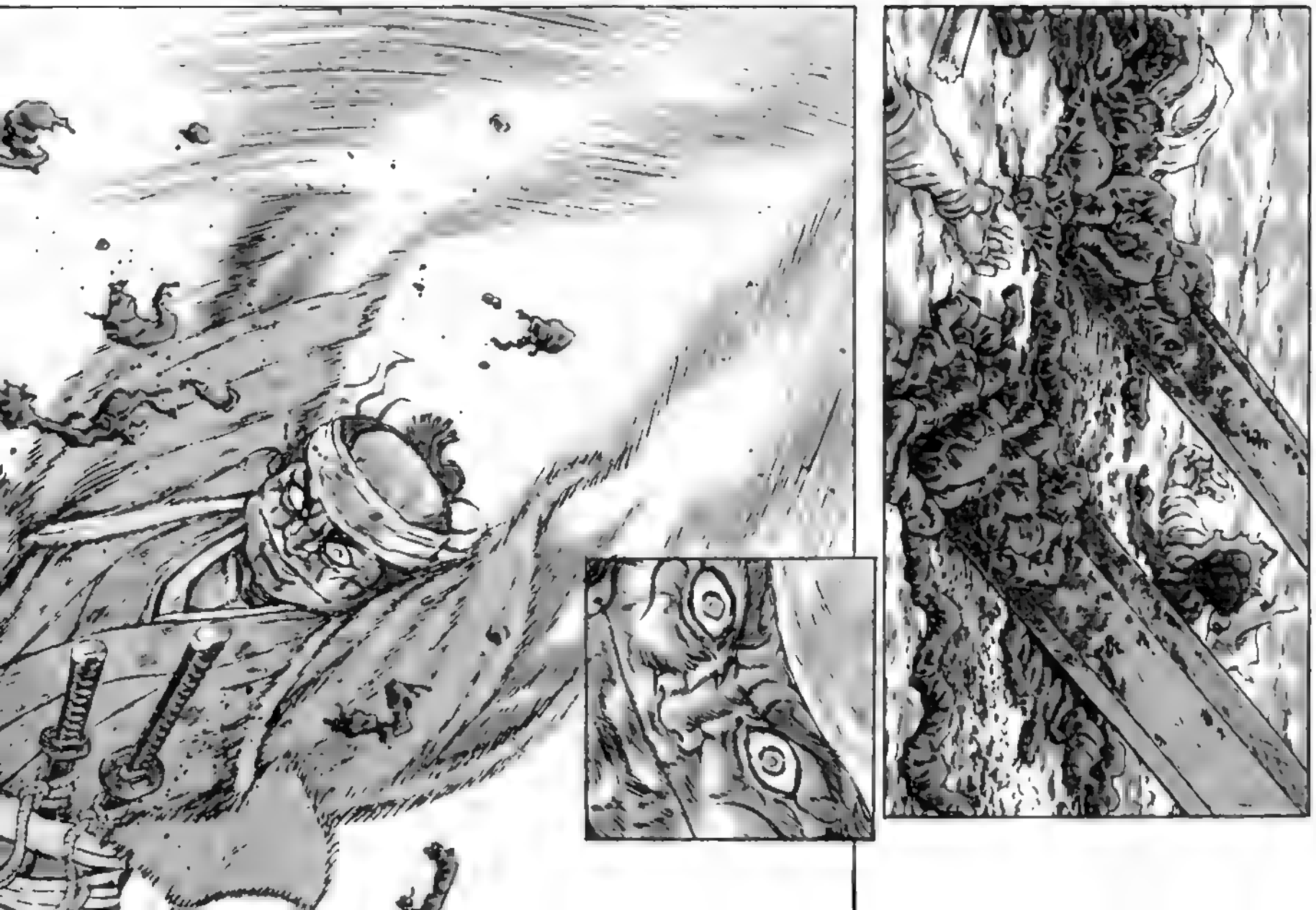

...AND
YOUNG
SERVANT
BOY HAD
BEEN
EXECUTED.

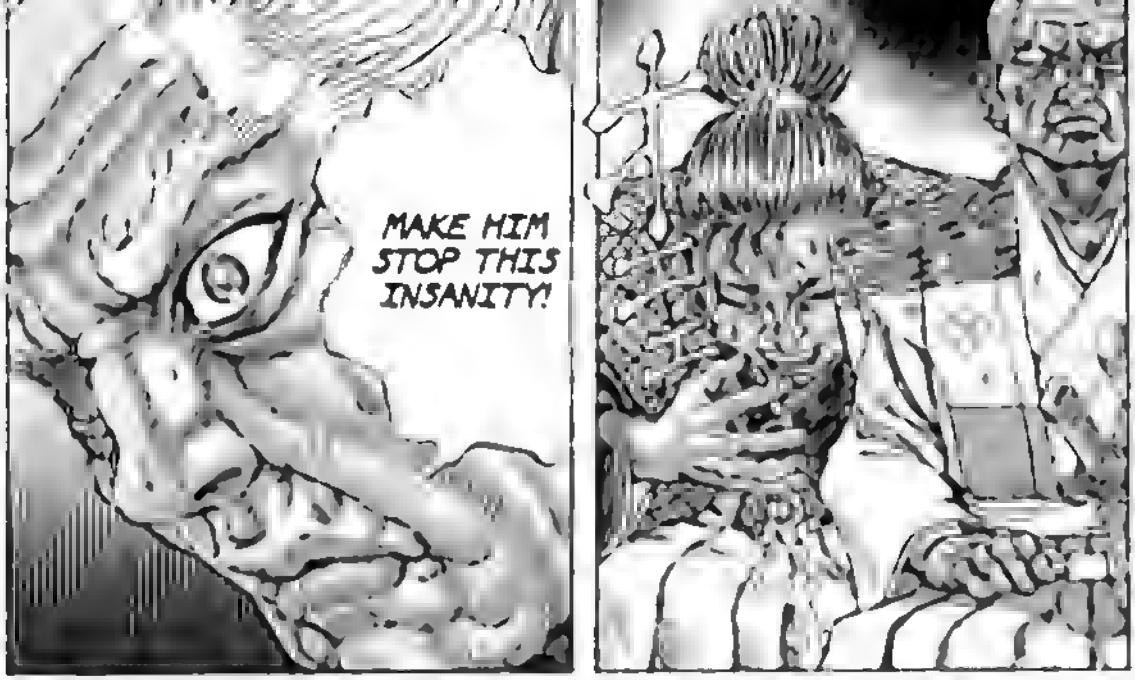
*A KAROU IN THE DIRECT SERVICE OF A TOKUGAWA CLANSMAN, DISPATCHED PERSONALLY BY THE SHOGUN.



WITH HIM WAS HIS FELLOW TSUKIKAROU AND SAMURAI TORII NARITSUGU.

THE FIGHT SHOULD BE COMING TO AN END NOW...

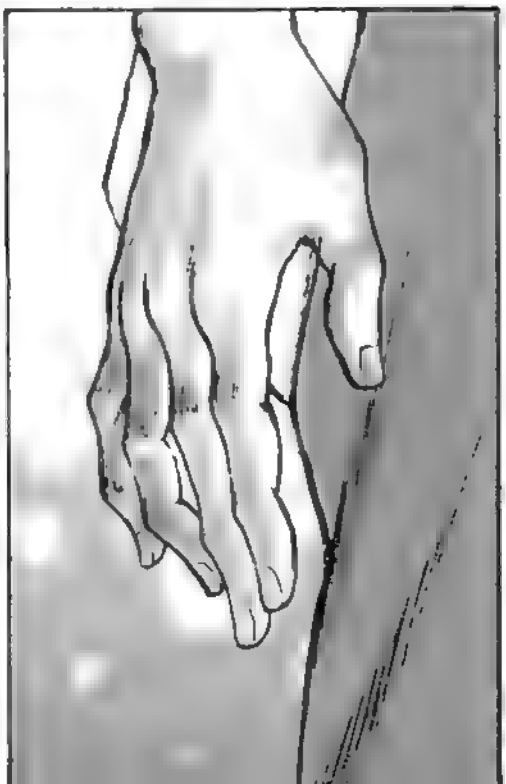



MAKE HIM STOP THIS INSANITY!

THOUGH
NOT A MAN AMONG THEM HAD THE NERVE TO STEP FORWARD

WAS A MAN NAMED ISHIDA MON-TAROU
THE ONE PERSON WHO WALKED OUT ALONE

HE WAS KNOWN AS "BOSATSU" ISHIDA.
AMONG HIS PEERS,

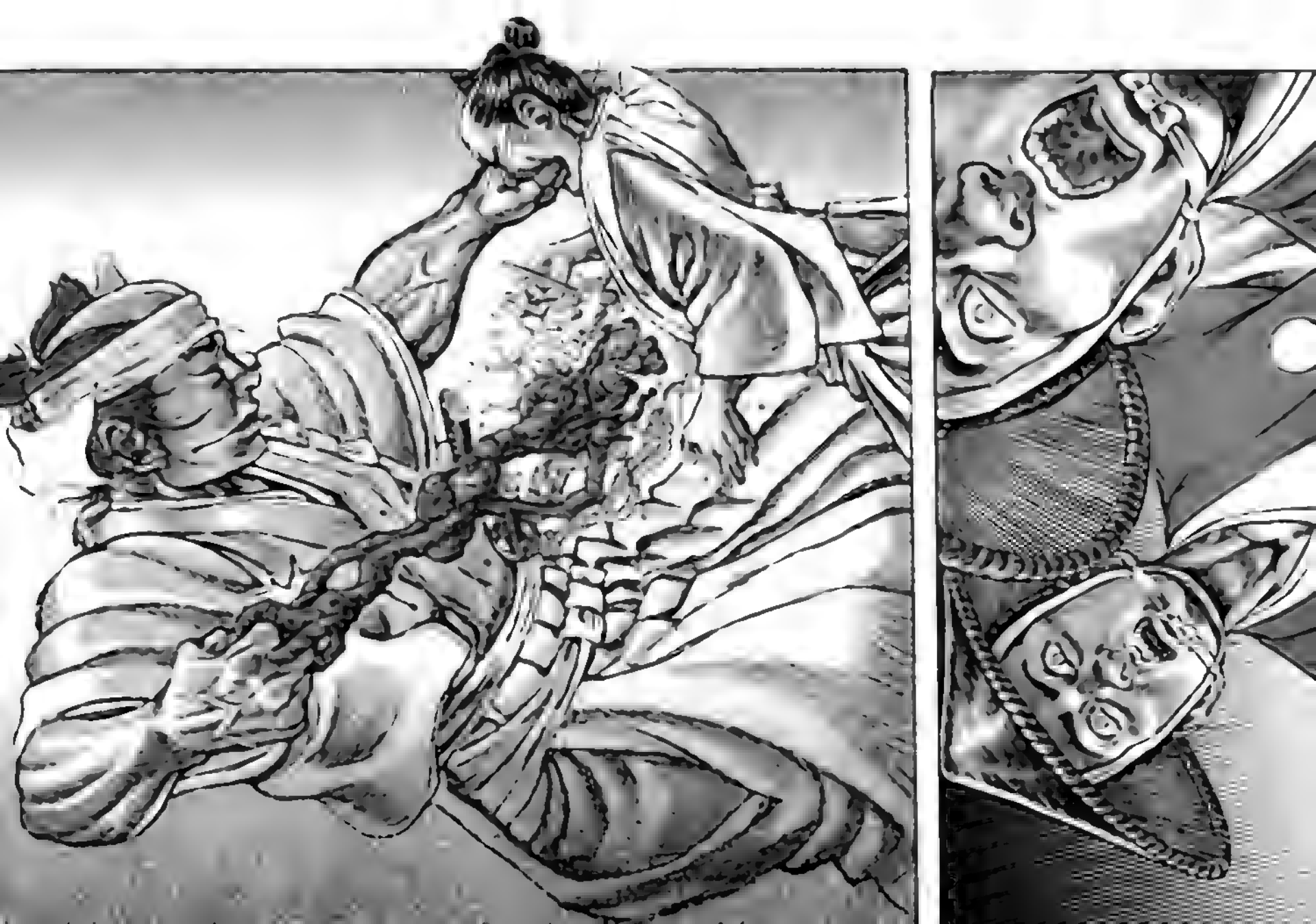


AT THE TIME, IT WAS COMMON FOR THE HUSBAND AND WIFE TO SEE EACH OTHER FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THEIR WEDDING DAY
THE THIRD DAUGHTER OF RANKING OFFICIAL TOYOOKA SOUEMON,
WAS SO HIDEOUS THAT SHE WAS OFTEN COMPARED TO A PRAYING MANTIS
THOUGH THOSE WHO KNEW HIM EXPRESSED THEIR PITY
ISHIDA HIMSELF LOVED AND CARED FOR HIS HOMELY WIFE
AND FATHERED THREE SONS

A PERSON SHOULD NOT BE JUDGED BY THEIR APPEARANCE.

USHIMATA-DONO.

SUCH PRETENTIOUS GUISES OF STRENGTH MUST BE MOST TIRING
I DID NOT THINK IT WOULD BE FOOLISH,
IF YOU WERE TO SEEK AID FROM SUCH A NUMBY



THE TOAD KNEW.
A BEAST THAT HAD ITS PREY IN ITS
POUNCED.

ごくり

HUUH?!

!GONZALMON!

AND THEN DARE TO KILL A MAN IN MY SERVICE, WHO CAME TO YOU IN PEACE! UNSPEAKABLY VILE WRETCH!
YOU DEFILE THIS SACRED GROUND WITH THE REMAINS OF THE ALREADY SLAIN.

AN INSANE MAN HAS NO RIGHT TO CLAIM VENGEANCE!
I, BISHAMONTEN, WILL STOP YOU!

NO THOUGHTS OF THE

MMM
YOU HAVE FALLEN INTO THE LIGHTLESS ABYSS, USHIMATA GONZAEMON.

CHAPTER 47
NEWBORN

FA, FATHER ...
EXCUSE ME, KAROU-SAMA.

FORGIVE ME USHIMATA-DONO
THIS DISASTER HAS COME ABOUT BECAUSE OF ME
I SHALL STAKE MY LIFE ON STOPPING HIM.
PLEASE SIT BACK AND WATCH.

I'D
REALIZED A
SHOCKING

THE MAN WHO HAD KILLED HER FIANCEE.
HAD BEEN NONE OTHER THAN USHIMATA...

GO
TO ZION
TEMPLE

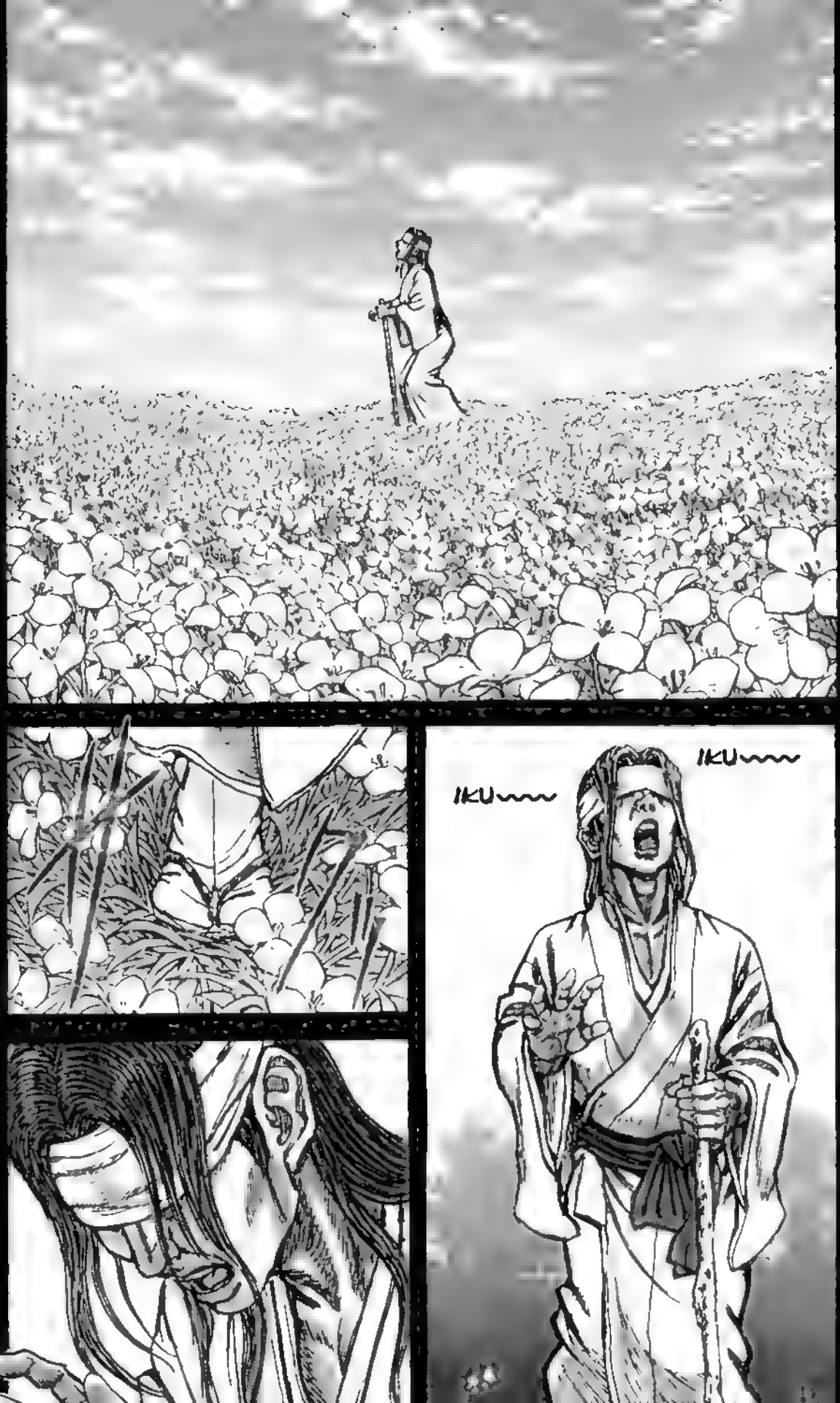
COME ENTER
OH DEAR WHAT A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

KAKEGAWA SAMURAI, KADONO YASUJIROU
KADONO'S DAUGHTER AND SAKURAI'S YOUNGER SISTER HAD BOTH FALLEN VICTIM TO SEIGEN'S ALLURE,
GIVING UP THEIR INNOCENCE TO HIS BASE DESIRES

NU
NU
NN
WHAT HAS HAPP-ENED TO MY NOSE?
WHIT OF MY NOSE? WHIT OF MY

YOUR FACE...
IS LIKE THAT OF A NEWBORN BABE...

THE MAN WHO SAVED THEM,
WAS A SWORDSMAN NAMED TSUKIOKA YUKINOSUKE
SEIGEN AND IKU FOUND SHELTER AT A VILLAGE IN THE HIDA MOUNTAINS.


IKU~~~
IKU~~~

IKU...

HE DID NOT STRIKE SEIGEN.
HIS BLADE DID NOT EVEN TOUCH SEIGEN'S SKIN.
BUT ...
SEIGEN FELL TO THE EARTH, UNCONSCIOUS.
TSUKIOKA'S KATANA SWIVELLED JUST BEFORE HE STRUCK,
HIS BLADE FACING INWARDS.

HE HAD "SEEN" IT.

"SHIGURUI"
Vol.9/END